Broadband Infrastructure Program

Frequently Asked Questions (released May 24, 2021 and updated August 13, 2021)

The below FAQs are for informational purposes only and are intended solely to assist potential applicants in better understanding the NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Program and the application requirements set forth in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for this program. The FAQs do not and are not intended to supersede, modify, or otherwise alter applicable statutory or regulatory requirements, or the specific application requirements set forth in the NOFO. In all cases, statutory and regulatory mandates, and the requirements set forth in the NOFO, shall prevail over any inconsistencies contained in the below FAQs.

Program Overview

What is the NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Program?

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Division N, Title IX, Section 905, Pub. L. No. 116-260, 134 Stat. 1182 (Dec. 27, 2020) (Act), provides new sources of broadband funding, including the Broadband Infrastructure Program, to support bridging the digital divide in unserved areas. The Act authorized NTIA to administer grants to "covered partnerships" for "covered broadband projects," defined as competitively and technologically neutral projects for the deployment of fixed broadband service that provides qualifying broadband service in an eligible service area.

What type of assistance is available in the Broadband Infrastructure Program?

The Broadband Infrastructure Program is a competitive grant program. NTIA will make up to $288M available for Federal assistance.

What is the target size of grant awards for projects?

NTIA expects to make awards under this program within the following funding range: $5M to $30M. This range is not a required minimum or maximum, but covered partnerships requesting amounts for projects outside of this range must provide a reasonable explanation for the variance in their project size.

Eligibility

Who can apply for funding under the Broadband Infrastructure Program?

Eligible applicants for this program are "covered partnerships," which means a partnership between: (A) a State, or one or more political subdivisions of a State; and (B) a provider of fixed broadband service. A covered partnership may include more than one provider of fixed broadband service as part of its application.

Can U.S. territories and/or the District of Columbia apply for funding under the Broadband Infrastructure Program?

Yes, the program's definition of "State" includes any State of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and any other territory or possession of the United States. Any of these entities may apply for a grant.

What kind of fixed broadband service providers are eligible to be part of covered partnerships?

Commercial/for-profit, municipal, non-profit, or cooperative broadband service providers are eligible fixed broadband service providers that can be part of a covered partnership.

Can a fixed broadband service provider be part of multiple covered partnerships?

Yes.

Is the fixed broadband service provider required to be an eligible telecommunications carrier pursuant to section 214(e) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 214(e))?

No.

Who must be the "lead" applicant for the grant funding?

The governmental entity (either a State or a political subdivision of a State that must be included in a covered partnership) must serve as the lead applicant for the covered partnership. The lead applicant would enter into the grant agreement with NTIA and assume primary operational and financial responsibility for completing the project should an award be made.

What are eligible projects under the Broadband Infrastructure Program?

Per the Act, "covered broadband projects" are eligible for Broadband Infrastructure Program funding. The term "covered broadband project" means a competitively and technologically neutral project for the deployment of fixed broadband service that provides qualifying broadband service in an eligible service area. The term "qualifying broadband service" means broadband service with: (A) a download speed of not less than 25 megabits per second; (B) an upload speed of not less than 3 megabits per second; and (C) a latency sufficient to support real time, interactive applications.

What areas are "eligible service areas" in the Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program?

The term "eligible service area" means a census block in which broadband service is not available at one or more households or businesses in the census block, as determined by the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information (the Assistant Secretary), on the basis of information and maps provided by the Federal Communications Commission, or other information available to the Assistant Secretary.

How does the Broadband Infrastructure Program define unserved?

Unserved is defined in Section 905(a)(14) of the Act as: (A) the household lacks access to qualifying broadband service; and (B) no broadband provider has been selected to receive, or is otherwise receiving, Federal or State funding subject to enforceable build out commitments to deploy qualifying broadband service in the specific area where the household is located by dates certain, even if such service is not yet available, provided that the Federal or State agency providing the funding has not deemed the service provider to be in default of its buildout obligations under the applicable Federal or State program.

Is there a limit on the number of applications an entity may submit?

Yes, a covered partnership may only submit one application. For example, a State or one or more political subdivisions of a State may only submit one application. However, a fixed broadband service provider may be a member of more than one covered partnership.

If the fixed broadband service provider is already receiving State or Federal funding for broadband deployment in the proposed service area, is the service area still eligible for grant funding under this program?

The Act requires the applicant to disclose any other Federal or State support that the broadband service provider that is part of the covered partnership has received to deploy broadband service in the proposed service area. NTIA will factor such information as it considers applications for grant awards, but the receipt of other Federal or State funds does not necessarily preclude the covered partnership from receiving a grant under the Broadband Infrastructure Program.

Do I need to coordinate with my State before submitting a grant application?

NTIA encourages political subdivisions of a State that are contemplating forming a covered partnership with one or more providers of fixed broadband service to coordinate and consult with the State's Broadband Office or other coordinating body to ensure that the proposal is consistent with a State's broadband plan or priorities. Such coordination enables the State to evaluate the proposed covered broadband projects presented for consideration and ensure the submission of top priority projects for funding under the Broadband Infrastructure Program. Additionally, the applicant must identify on Line 19 of the SF-424 application form whether the application is subject to State review pursuant to Executive Order 12372 and whether the application was selected for review by the State.

Is there a matching requirement for the Broadband Infrastructure Program?

The Act authorizing the establishment of the Broadband Infrastructure Program does not contain a statutory cost sharing or matching funds requirement for this grant program. NTIA will not require a covered partnership applying for a grant under the Broadband Infrastructure Program to provide a cost match; however, NTIA will favorably consider applications that propose to contribute a non-Federal cost share of at least 10 percent of the total eligible costs of a project. Applicants proposing a cost share amount must document their capacity to provide matching funds in their applications. Matching funds may be in the form of either cash or in-kind contributions consistent with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200.

Non-Federal cost share committed to an award by a covered partnership will be treated as voluntary committed cost sharing and will be a binding commitment under the award. The failure of a covered partnership to meet its voluntary committed cost share may result in a decrease in and/or a recovery of Federal grant funds.

What are eligible uses of Broadband Infrastructure Program funds?

Grant recipients may only use Federal award funds and any non-Federal cost share committed to an award to pay for allowable costs under the Broadband Infrastructure Program. Allowable costs are determined in accordance with the cost principles identified in 2 C.F.R. Part 200, including Subpart E of such regulations for States and non-profit organizations, and in 48 C.F.R. Part 31 for commercial

organizations, as well as in the grant program's authorizing legislation.

Based on the scope of the Broadband Infrastructure Program, below are non-exclusive examples of how a covered partnership may generally leverage grant funds:

- Fund the costs of construction, improvement, and/or acquisition of facilities and telecommunications equipment required to provide qualifying broadband service, including infrastructure for backhaul, middle and last mile networks.
- Fund the cost of long-term leases (for terms greater than one year) of facilities required to provide qualifying broadband service, including indefeasible right-of-use (IRU) agreements.
- Fund the costs of engineering design, permitting and work related to environmental, historical and cultural reviews.
- Fund personnel costs, including salaries and fringe benefits for staff and consultants required for the implementation of the Broadband Infrastructure Program (such as project managers, program directors, subject matter experts, grant administrators, financial analysts, accountants, and attorneys).
- Fund reasonable pre-application expenses in an amount not to exceed $50,000. Pre-application expenses, which include expenses related to preparing an application and limited project related costs which may include the purchase of equipment or supplies, subject to a number of limitations discussed in the 6th set of FAQs, may be reimbursed if they are incurred after the publication date of the NOFO and prior to the date of issuance of the grant award from NTIA, except that lobbying costs and contingency fees are not reimbursable from grant funds. Pre-application costs should be clearly identified in the proposed project budget. Additionally, pre-application costs are incurred at the sole risk of the applicant and will not be reimbursed by NTIA if the proposed project does not receive an award pursuant to this program. *For updated information about pre-award costs, please see the third question under "Eligibility" in the Broadband Infrastructure FAQ Set 6, published on 8-11-2021.*
- Fund other allowable costs necessary to carrying out programmatic activities of an award, not to include ineligible costs described in Section IV.J.2 of the NOFO.

What are ineligible uses of Broadband Infrastructure Program funds?

Ineligible costs include those costs that are unallowable under the applicable Federal cost principles. Please note that costs ineligible for the Broadband Infrastructure Program may not be paid for with non-Federal cost share committed to an award. These cost prohibitions apply to all members of a covered partnership. Additional ineligible costs are listed below:

- Prohibition On Use of Grant Funds For Covered Communications Equipment Or Services.—A covered partnership may not use grant funds received under the Broadband Infrastructure Program to purchase or support any covered communications equipment or service (as defined in section 9 of the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act of 2019 (47 U.S.C. 1608)).
- Prohibition on Profit and Fees.—A profit, fee, or other incremental charge above actual cost is not an allowable cost under this program.
- Prohibition on Use of Grant Funds to Support or Oppose Collective Bargaining.—A covered partnership may not use grant funds, whether directly or indirectly as an offset for other funds, to support or oppose collective bargaining.

- Provider of Broadband Services – The following cost prohibitions apply to a provider of broadband services that is a member of a covered partnership. As a condition of receiving a grant under the Broadband Infrastructure Program, a provider of broadband service that is part of a covered partnership receiving the grant is prohibited:
  - From using the grant amounts to repay, or make any other payment relating to, a loan made by any public or private lender.
  - From using grant amounts as collateral for a loan made by any public or private lender.
  - From using more than $50,000 of the grant amounts to pay for the preparation of the grant. *For updated information about pre-award costs, please see the third question under "Eligibility" in the Broadband Infrastructure FAQ Set 6, published on 8-11-2021.*
  - From using grant funds to pay for previously incurred administrative costs or previously purchased equipment or construction activities undertaken prior to the award. *For updated information about pre-award costs, please see the third question under "Eligibility" in the Broadband Infrastructure FAQ Set 6, published on 8-11-2021.*
  - From using grant funds to pay for the costs of providing broadband service to any locations that are used to meet an FCC Universal Service Fund (USF) deployment obligation.

How to Apply

When does the application period open, and when is the deadline to apply?

NTIA is accepting applications for the Broadband Infrastructure Program from the date of the release of the NOFO through Tuesday, August 17, 2021. Complete applications must be received by www.grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on **August 17, 2021.** The 90-day application window is a statutory requirement and NTIA cannot grant any extensions of the August 17 deadline.

What do I need to apply?

Applicants must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number, active System for Award Management (SAM) registration, and Grants.gov account to apply for grants.

How do I get a DUNs number?

All entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a DUNS Number from Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). Applicants must enter the DUNS Number in the data entry field labeled "Organizational DUNS" on the SF-424 form. For more detailed instructions for obtaining a DUNS Number, refer to: https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-1-obtain-duns-number.html. Applicants can receive a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS number request line at 1-866-705-5711 or via the Internet at http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform.

How do I register in SAM?

All applicants must register in SAM before submitting a complete application packet. Additionally, the applicant must maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it

has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. SAM registration must be renewed annually. For more detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to: https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-2-register-with-sam.html. Applicants can register for the SAM at https://www.sam.gov/. Note that the free annual registration process in SAM.gov generally takes between three (3) and five (5) business days, but can take more than three weeks. Please note that a Federal assistance award cannot be issued if the designated recipient's registration in SAM.gov is not current at the time of the award.

How do I create a Grants.gov account?

Applicants can register an account with Grants.gov by following the on-screen instructions or refer to the detailed instructions here: https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html.

In addition, see the NOFO section IV.L.1.4-6 for additional information on navigating Grants.gov, including how to add a profile to a Grants.gov account, organization roles authorization and designation of the grant Authorized Organization Representative (AOR), how to track role requests, and AOR signature process (which is required for a complete application and is an often missed step).

Can applicants use the Grants.gov Workspace to submit an application?

Yes. Grants.gov applicants can apply online using Workspace. Workspace is a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different webforms within an application. Below is an overview of using Workspace when applying for Federal grants on Grants.gov. For access to complete instructions on how to apply for opportunities, refer to: https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html

In addition, see Section IV.L.2 of the NOFO for additional information on using Workspace to submit your application.

How do I access the application?

Application forms and instructions are available on the Grants.gov website (www.grants.gov). To access these materials, go to http://www.grants.gov, select "How to Apply for Grants," and then select "Search for Opportunity Package." Enter the CFDA number (11.031) and/or the funding opportunity number (NTIA-Broadband-Infrastructure-Program-2021). Select "Grant Opportunity Package," and then follow the prompts. To download the instructions, go to "Preview Opportunity Package" and select "Download Instructions."

NTIA recommends that applicants visit Grants.gov prior to filing their applications so that they fully understand the process and requirements. Applications are accepted until the deadline and are processed as received. Late or incomplete applications and applications submitted by mail, courier, or by facsimile will not be accepted.

What information is required in the application?

Please see NOFO section IV.B -- Content and Form of Applications for a detailed list of Standard Forms (SF) and related documentation required for submission. Items in Section IV.B.1 though IV.B.5 of the

NOFO are part of the standard application package in Grants.gov and can be completed through the download application process.

Items in Section IV.B.6 through IV.B.12 of the NOFO must be completed and attached by clicking on "Add Attachments" found in item 15 of the SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance. This will create a zip file that allows for transmittal of the documents electronically via Grants.gov.

Applicants should carefully follow specific Grants.gov instructions at www.Grants.gov to ensure the attachments will be accepted by the Grants.gov system. A receipt from Grants.gov indicates only that an application was transferred to a system. It does not provide details concerning whether all attachments (or how many attachments) transferred successfully. Applicants will receive a series of e-mail messages over a period of up to two business days before learning whether a Federal agency's electronic system has received its application.

Are there any additional application format restrictions or requirements?

Yes. Additional application instructions include:

- Applications only will be accepted electronically through Grants.gov. Paper, email and facsimile submissions will not be accepted.
- Any figures, graphs, images, and pictures should be of a size that is easily readable or viewable and may be landscape orientation.
- All documents must have an easy to read font (10-point minimum), however smaller type may be used in figures and tables but must be clearly legible.
- Applicants may use single spacing or double spacing and margins should be at least one inch top, bottom, left, and right.
- Application documents should be portrait orientation except for figures, graphs, images, and pictures.
- Paragraphs are to be clearly separated from each other by double spacing, paragraph formatting or equivalent.
- Page Limits:
    - The Project Narrative is limited to 20 pages single spaced (40 pages double spaced), noting the limit of two (2) pages for the Executive Summary.
    - Resumes and environmental and historic preservation review documentation are not included in the page count of the Proposal Narrative.
    - If resumes are included, resumes must be a maximum of one (1) page each.
- Ensure all pages are numbered sequentially.
- Application page size must be 8½ inches by 11 inches.
- Applications must be submitted in English.
- All applications, including forms, must be typed.

How will I know if I successfully submitted my application in Grants.gov?

Applicants will receive e-mail notifications from Grants.gov over a period of up to two (2) business days as the application moves through intermediate systems before the applicant learns via a validation or rejection notification whether a Federal agency's electronic system has received the application. (See

Grants.gov for full information on application and notification through Grants.gov). This email notification interval should be taken into consideration in the grant application timeline.

Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov. An electronic date/time stamp is generated within the system when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant with the AOR role who submitted the application will receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov with the successful transmission of their application. This applicant with the AOR role will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov Tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When NTIA successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, and acknowledges the download of submissions, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgment of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role who submitted the application. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Applications received by Grants.gov after the established due date for the program will be considered late and will not be considered for funding by NTIA.

Applicants using a slow Internet connection, such as dial-up, should be aware that transmission can take some time before Grants.gov receives your application. Again, Grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received transmission in the form of an email sent to the applicant with the AOR role attempting to submit the application. The Grants.gov Support Center reports that some applicants end the transmission because they think that nothing is occurring during the transmission process. Please be patient and give the system time to process the application.

Will NTIA provide the opportunity to cure applications if there are issues in the application?

Yes, as set forth in Section V.B. of the NOFO, NTIA will provide applicants with the opportunity to cure application deficiencies during the application review process. Only applications submitted by the application deadline will be provided with an opportunity to cure deficiencies. Applications submitted after the deadline or by an ineligible entity will not be accepted by NTIA.

Will NTIA offer trainings or other resources to help with the application?

NTIA is providing webinars for the three grant programs, including the Broadband Infrastructure program. Sign up for BroadbandUSA updates for the most up-to-date information.

Evaluation of Applications

What are the funding priorities for the Broadband Infrastructure Program?

The Assistant Secretary will give priority to applications for covered broadband projects as follows, in decreasing order of priority, as set forth in Section 905(d)(4) of the Act:

> (1) Covered broadband projects designed to provide broadband service to the greatest number of households in an eligible service area;

(2) Covered broadband projects designed to provide broadband service in an eligible service area that is wholly within any area other than:

(i) a county, city, or town that has a population of more than 50,000 inhabitants; and

(ii) the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town of more than 50,000 inhabitants;

(3) Covered broadband projects that are the most cost-effective, prioritizing such projects in areas that are the most rural;

(4) Covered broadband projects designed to provide broadband service with a download speed of not less than 100 megabits per second and an upload speed of not less than 20 megabits per second; and

(5) Any other covered broadband project that meets the requirements of this NOFO.

NTIA is interested in ensuring that any broadband infrastructure deployed under this grant program will have the ability to evolve, sustain, and scale for future advanced services that will also be important to the U.S. economy. In the years ahead, emerging technologies such as cloud technologies, artificial intelligence, health IoT and telemedicine, smart grid, and 5G, will all require broadband networks capable of delivering much faster speeds, lower latency, and higher reliability than those now codified by various Federal agencies. Thus, NTIA encourages the submission of project proposals that deploy future-proof infrastructure, e.g., fiber.

NTIA will sequence all applications that address priority one and propose a covered broadband project designed to provide broadband service to the greatest number of (unserved) households in an eligible service area and evaluate them against the objective criteria set forth in Section V.A of the NOFO to determine their eligibility for award. To the extent that funding remains available after NTIA completes its review of priority one applications, NTIA will then sequence applications that address priority two. NTIA will continue this priority sequencing process until it has awarded all available funding.

How will applications be reviewed/evaluated?

The review process will be divided into three stages: (1) Initial Administrative and Eligibility Review of complete application packets; (2) Merit Review; and (3) Programmatic Review. Not all applications will necessarily proceed through all three review stages depending on the results of the review process.

What is the process for the Administrative and Eligibility Review?

NTIA will perform an initial Administrative and Eligibility Review of applications received on time through Grants.gov to determine eligibility, completeness and responsiveness to the programmatic requirements of the Broadband Infrastructure Program, including a review of the project narrative and budget justification. Applications submitted by other than an eligible applicant will be eliminated from further review. NTIA may continue the initial administrative review process for an application that is timely submitted by an eligible applicant, but that is missing certain information or documentation required by the NOFO and will request missing or incomplete information from the applicant as needed. The applicant will have seven (7) calendar days to submit materials responsive to the feedback provided by NTIA, unless this period is extended by NTIA. Pursuant to Section 905(e)(2)(B) of the Act, an eligible

applicant's failure to remedy deficiencies in a timely manner may result in NTIA's denial of the application.

If my application passes the initial Administrative and Eligibility Review, will my application will go through the Merit Review process?

Given the limited amount of funding available for broadband infrastructure deployment awards and the potentially large number of covered partnerships that may submit applications for this grant program, NTIA will review applications based on the priorities enumerated in Section 905(d)(4) of the Act (and set forth in Section I.A of the NOFO) in their statutory order of priority. NTIA will first sequence all applications for Merit Review that address priority one by proposing a covered broadband project designed to provide broadband service to the greatest number of households in an eligible service area and evaluate them against the objective criteria set forth in Section V.A of the NOFO to determine their eligibility for award. To the extent that funding remains available after NTIA completes its review of priority one applications, NTIA will then review applications that address priority two. NTIA will continue this priority sequencing process until it has awarded all available funding.

What is the Merit Review process?

Applications satisfying the Initial Administrative and Eligibility Review will be evaluated by at least two objective reviewers who have demonstrated expertise in the programmatic aspects of the Broadband Infrastructure Program. They may be Federal employees or non-Federal persons. During the review process, the reviewers may discuss the applications with each other, but scores will be determined on an individual basis.

How will the Merit Review evaluators score my application?

Reviewers will evaluate applications according to the evaluation criteria provided in Section V.A of the NOFO and independently score each application based on a scale of 0-100. The evaluation criteria that will be used by the Merit Reviewers to review and analyze Broadband Infrastructure Program applications are grouped into three categories: (1) Project Purpose and Benefits (30 points); (2) Project Viability (40 points); and (3) Project Budget and Sustainability (30 points). Each application will be evaluated against objective criteria. See Section V.A of the NOFO for a detailed description of the evaluation criteria that reviewers will apply under each category.

What if NTIA or Merit Review evaluators have questions about my application?

NTIA and reviewers may request additional clarifying information or corroborating documentation from an applicant during the course of the Merit Review and may suggest revisions be made to an application to resolve perceived material programmatic or financial weaknesses or deficiencies and may factor such additional materials into their assigned scores for an application. In such cases, NTIA will review the feedback from the Merit Reviewers, and will contact the applicant and provide the applicant with an opportunity to respond to the Merit Review feedback. The applicant will have ten (10) calendar days to respond to the reviewer feedback, unless this time period is extended by NTIA. NTIA may use its sole discretion to terminate the Merit Review revision process for an applicant if, after multiple opportunities to respond to Merit Review feedback, NTIA determines that the applicant is not sufficiently responding to requests for additional information or remedying application deficiencies.

What applications will pass onto the Programmatic Review part of the application review process?

Based on an average of the reviewers' scores, applications will be assigned adjectival ratings for each priority group in accordance with the following scale:

- Qualified for Funding – (70-100 points)
- Unqualified for Funding – (0-69 points)

What is evaluated in the Programmatic Review of applications?

NTIA Program Staff will review applications determined to be qualified for funding during the Merit Review process for conformity with programmatic objectives, requirements and priorities as a part of the Programmatic Review. NTIA Program Staff will prioritize applications for Programmatic Review based on the priorities for the Broadband Infrastructure Program set forth in Section 905(d)(4) of the Act (*see* Section I.A of the NOFO).

During Programmatic Review, NTIA may ask applicants to submit additional information to clarify or to further substantiate the representations made in their applications. NTIA Program Staff will review the supplemental information, along with all information submitted with the application, to confirm eligibility and evaluate the applications with respect to the requirements and priorities of the Broadband Infrastructure Program.

How will NTIA evaluate and validate proposed service areas?

NTIA Program Staff will use available data from the FCC, as required in the Act, to validate eligible service areas. The FCC Form 477 data is a data layer in NTIA's National Broadband Availability Map (NBAM), and NTIA will rely on the FCC's data, along with other datasets contained in the NBAM and other available information, to validate applicants' proposed service areas as meeting the Act's definition of eligible service area. Further, NTIA also will use data submitted by service providers in response to pending grant application proposed service areas, as detailed in NOFO section VIII.B. "Announcement of Proposed Service Areas."

Will there be a challenge process for the proposed service area?

Yes, please see section VIII.B of the NOFO, which describes the process for existing broadband service providers to challenge the funding eligibility of the proposed service areas designated by covered partnerships in their covered broadband projects.

Can NTIA ask for changes in my application in the review process?

NTIA reserves the right at any time during the Merit and Programmatic Review processes to negotiate with the applicant relative to specific modifications to the application, including but not limited to the resolution of any differences that may exist between the applicant's original request and NTIA's determination of eligible service areas, eligible costs, and Broadband Infrastructure Program funding priorities.

How are final awards decided in the Broadband Infrastructure Program?

At the conclusion of the Programmatic Review, NTIA Program Staff will summarize their analysis for each application reviewed. The Associate Administrator for NTIA's Office of Telecommunications and

Information Applications (OTIA Associate Administrator) will prepare a rank order of applications within a particular priority grouping and present a package or packages of recommended grant awards to the Selecting Official for review and approval. The OTIA Associate Administrator's recommendations to the Selecting Official will consider the following selection factors:

1. The scores and technical comments of the objective expert reviewers during Merit Review.

2. The analysis of NTIA Program Staff during Programmatic Review.

3. Satisfaction of the Broadband Infrastructure Program priorities set forth in Section 905(d)(4) of the Act.

4. The extent to which the applicant proposes to contribute non-Federal cost share to fund a portion of the total eligible costs of the project.

5. The equitable geographic distribution of the proposed grant awards.

6. The extent to which the infrastructure investment is necessary to provide qualifying broadband service in the proposed service area and is unlikely to be made using private sources of funds.

7. Whether, and the extent to which, the applicant proposes to incorporate strong labor protections into the performance of the construction project, including paying prevailing wages.

8. Avoidance of duplication with the initiatives of other Federal agencies, including Department of Agriculture loan and grant programs for broadband services, applicable universal service programs authorized by the Federal Communications Commission.

9. The availability of funds.

The Assistant Secretary, or their designee, will serve as the Selecting Official for the Broadband Infrastructure Program. The Assistant Secretary will generally select and recommend applications for funding based on the rank order within each priority grouping prepared by the OTIA Associate Administrator. The Selecting Official retains discretion to select and recommend an application for funding that was not recommended by the OTIA Associate Administrator based on one or more of the selection factors listed in Section V.C. of the NOFO, or not to select an application that was recommended for funding by the OTIA Associate Administrator. The Assistant Secretary will submit the applications recommended for funding, along with the bases for the selection decisions, to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Grants Officer, who serves as the Grants Officer for the Broadband Infrastructure Program. The final approval of selected applications and the issuance of awards will be made by the NIST Grants Officer. The award decisions of the NIST Grants Officer are final.

How will I be notified if my application is selected for an award?

A grants officer from the NIST Grants Office will serve as the Grants Officer for awards issued pursuant to this NOFO. Applicants will be notified in writing by the NIST Grants Officer if their application is selected for an award. (Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified in writing.) If the application is selected for funding, the NIST Grants Officer will issue the grant award (Form CD-450), which is the authorizing financial assistance award document. By signing the Form CD-450, the recipient agrees to comply with all award provisions, terms, and conditions.

Grant Award and Reporting Requirements

What rules or requirements will the grant award be subject to?

Grant recipients will comply with applicable statutes and regulations, including but not limited to the provisions listed in section VI.D of the NOFO. These provisions include the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements (2 C.F.R. part 200), Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, Pre-Award Notification Requirements, Environmental and National Historical Preservation Requirements, Property Trust Relationship and Public Notice Filings for Grant-Acquired Property, Open Network Requirements, Domestic Preference for Procurements (Buy American), and Contracting with Small and Minority Businesses, Women's Business Enterprises, and Labor Surplus Area Firms.

What are the reporting requirements for awarded projects?

Grant awardees will be required to submit financial and programmatic/technical reports on their project semi-annually. Grant awardees will be required to submit an annual report and specific project data, as specified in section VI.E.2 of the NOFO, to NTIA. Section VI.E of the NOFO provides additional details on grant awardee reporting requirements.

What is the grant award period of performance and by when must awarded grant funds be expended?

The Act requires covered partnerships to complete their covered broadband projects within one year of their initial receipt of grant funds.

Will NTIA allow grant period of performance extensions?

Yes, the Assistant Secretary may grant an extension for broadband construction projects. To be considered for an extension, the covered partnership must certify that it has a plan for use of the funds; the construction project is underway; or extenuating circumstances require an extension to ensure project completion.

How are grant period of performance extensions granted?

The applicant/covered partnership may submit a request for an extension of the one-year award period with its application or not later than ninety (90) calendar days before the end of the award period.

What happens if the covered partnership does not expend all of its funds at the end of its grant period of performance?

NTIA will make any grant funds not expended by a covered partnership by the end of the one-year award period set forth in the Act available to other covered partnerships for the purposes provided in the Broadband Infrastructure Program, unless the Assistant Secretary has granted the covered partnership an extension of time to complete its project.   NTIA retains discretion to make supplemental awards to a covered partnership to the extent that another covered partnership does not expend some or all of its grant funds during the other covered partnership's period of performance.